

Bookmobile Service

The Wilmington Public Library co-sponsored a WPA bookmobile that was designed to provide reading material for shipyard and army families. Although the

Books For War Worker And Soldier Families In Wilmington Area



Wilmington's bookmobile in 1942

bookmobile was operated chiefly as a war recreation project, all persons were welcome to use the library. Another war recreation project, a 5,000 book library, was opened at the Lake Forest war housing project.

Throughout the war, library circulation and registration fluctuated, depending on troop levels. Plentiful employment also kept residents from

visiting the city library in person. The war itself created the necessity of getting books to the readers rather than the other way around. War workers as well as servicemen and their families lived throughout the county.

The bookmobile stopped in Wrightsboro; Castle Hayne; Middle Sound; Greenville Sound; Winter Park; Wrightsville Sound; Wrightsville Beach; Carolina Beach; Kure Beach; the shipyard trailer camp; Maffitt Village; Lake Forest; and Hillcrest, as well as several stops within the city limits. When the WPA terminated control of the bookmobile in 1943, the county commissioners agreed to supplement funds provided by the city and the Housing Authority to keep the service going. The bookmobile was purchased from the Federal government for \$200.

From the time the Wilmington Public Library took over complete management of the bookmobile and the Lake Forest Library, total circulation soared. During the busiest year on record, June 1943 to June 1944, 167,216 books were checked out.

The Library Comes to Carolina Beach

By 1943, bookmobile service had become so popular at Carolina Beach that the Woman's Club asked the library Board of Trustees for help starting their own library. The Wilmington Public Library offered them 500 books, with the understanding that the club would fund reading rooms and a librarian. The Carolina Beach Library became a reality in 1950.



Soldiers at popular Carolina Beach during WWII

Searching for a Permanent Home

By the end of World War II, the Wilmington Public Library was one of the busiest public libraries in the state. The city and county appropriations totaled about \$11,000 per year, and state aid added another \$1,800.

In March 1946, the mayor asked the library Board of Trustees to look into moving the library out of City Hall. For



Front Street in the 1940s

many years, the city fathers had wanted to expand their operations into the library rooms, and it was well-known that the library had outgrown its space.

With the death of Miss Ellen Bellamy, the mayor thought that the board should consider a move to the Bellamy Mansion.

In the late 1940s, the majority of Wilmington residents still lived and worked downtown. The Tide Water Power Company closed streetcar service in 1939, and bus service was inaugurated. Most city dwellers could still walk or take public transportation to the library. The bookmobile was providing adequate service to outlying suburbs and rural areas of the county.

The Bellamy Mansion was thought to be a suitable location for a new library facility, and the 50 heirs to the property were willing to permit acquisition if the facility were to be known as the "Bellamy Public Library." Many also felt that the historic building could accommodate the county museum that was housed in the New Hanover County Court House annex.

Louis J. Poisson, a member of the library Board of Trustees, was appointed to chair a committee of citizens to study the possibility of renovating the Bellamy Mansion as a library-museum or library and arts center. He reported back to the mayor that: the old building was not suitable for a library; renovations would be too costly; and the project would destroy the character of the mansion. The Wilmington Public Library remained in City Hall for 10 more years.



Bellamy Mansion c. 1950
Considered as a library site

Change on the Horizon

At the end of the 1940s, no one anticipated the impending despair associated with the removal of the headquarters of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad from Wilmington to Jacksonville, Florida.